



# REFORMING PAROLE

## Governor Schwarzenegger's Proposal

### **Strengthening public safety**

The current parole system threatens public safety by dedicating resources to irrelevant issues and ignoring violent felons. Only one other state shares California's parole structure. The Governor proposes examining California's parole structure, with the goal of dramatically reducing current caseloads and allowing the state to designate an additional 200 parole agents to enforcing Jessica's Law—which increases parole times for the most serious sexual crimes and mandates lifetime monitoring of convicted felony sex offenders. The Governor's proposed sentencing commission will review California's parole structure and recommend changes.

### On the Record

**Professor of Criminology Joan Petersilia: California's Parole System Is The Major Contributor To The Prison Population.** *"The state's parole system is the major contributor to the prison population, sending about 70,000 parole violators back to prison each year, according to data compiled by Petersilia, the UC Irvine criminologist. Petersilia's research indicates that about 20 percent of those violators go in and out of prisons without ever committing a violent offense. Many are returned to prison for repeatedly failing drug tests or other parole violations such as failing to notify parole agents of an address change. Each time, they typically serve less than four months in prison and get no rehabilitation."* - "California's prison system produces bizarre and dangerous results harmful to inmates and public," San Francisco Chronicle, August 27, 2006

**LAPD Assistant Police Chief George Gascon: Parole Agents Overwhelmed.** *"The discussion is always about funding. But when it costs an average of \$31,000 a year to keep someone in prison and \$3,300 a year to keep someone on parole, and we're doing a very poor job of supervising them, there has to be a little more we can do to make the parole system work...And it's not because parole agents are not doing their jobs. They are overwhelmed."* - "Warrants Out for 7,000 Parole Violators," Pasadena Star-News, July 5, 2005.

**Professor of Criminology Joan Petersilia: Giving Low-Risk Felons A Chance To Shorten Parole Terms Is "Good Policy."** *"This is good policy because it adds a carrot to the stick we use so heavily in parole in this state," she said. "The research shows that if you give people incentives, they are more likely to stay involved in treatment and succeed." (On how other states have demonstrated the benefit of giving low-risk ex-felons a chance to shorten their parole terms through good behavior.)* - "Gov. signs bill allowing shorter parole for some ex-cons who finish drug programs," Los Angeles Times, October 4, 2006.

**Court Receiver Robert Sillen: An "Effective" Prisons Solution Will "Require Changes" In Parole Policy.** *"With most prisons now at 200 percent of inmate capacity, Sillen said an effective solution to overcrowding would require changes in sentencing and parole policies to reduce the number of prisoners."* - "Report blasts prison health system," Sacramento Bee, July 6, 2006.

### Just the Facts

- According to the Public Policy Institute of California, the current parole system increases the likelihood that parolees will return to prison. California does not use any intermediate level punishment – if an offender violates parole, they would go back to prison, no matter how minor the violation. Source: "Who's in Prison? The Changing Demographics of Incarceration," Amanda Bailey, Joseph M. Hayes, Public Policy Institute of California. August 2006.
- "California's nearly universal application of parole supervisions standards in sharp contrast to the approach used in most of the rest of the nation. Several other states supervise only certain high-risk prisoners after release. A few states, including Maine and Virginia, have abolished parole supervision altogether. Michigan supervises parolees for only two years, compared to California's three-, four-, or five-year supervision period...Still others, such as Florida, release all inmates through a nondiscretionary process but apply parole supervision to fewer than half of those individuals." Source: "Understanding California Corrections", Dr. Joan Petersilia, California Policy Research Center, 2006.

- *Between 1991 and 2001, the number of parolees returned annually to California prisons for committing new crimes or other offenses decreased from 16,000 to 14,351 (or 9.2 percent decrease). Within the same timeframe, however, the annual number of parolees returned to prison for violating the conditions of their parole increased from 41,333 to 74,275 – an increase of 44 percent.* Source: "Adult Parole and Probation in California," Marcus Nieto, California Research Bureau. September 2003.
- *The Little Hoover Commission has repeatedly stressed the need for parole reform, calling California's current system "a billion dollar failure."* Source: "The Lynchpin To Parole Reform: A Case Study of Two Parolee Housing Proposals in Redlands, California," Benjamin Singerman, Joan Petersilia, Stanford Criminal Justice Center. Fall 2005.
- *Noted experts in the corrections field, such as Joan Petersilia and Benjamin Singerman, have called for California to revamp its parole system to improve cost efficiency and direct focus on effectively preventing recidivism.* Source: "The Lynchpin To Parole Reform: A Case Study of Two Parolee Housing Proposals in Redlands, California," Benjamin Singerman, Joan Petersilia, Stanford Criminal Justice Center. Fall 2005.
- *A March 2005 study by The Urban Institute found that, while there were small overall differences in recidivism based on supervision status, rates fell substantially when females, individuals with few prior arrests, public order offenders, and those imprisoned for violating a condition of an earlier release were supervised. Parolees in more than one of these categories, mostly relatively low-level offenders, exhibit even lower rearrest rates.* Source: "Does Parole Work? Analyzing the Impact of Postprison Supervision on Rearrest Outcomes," Amy L. Solomon, Vera Kachnowski, Avinash Bhati, The Urban Institute. March 2005.